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Learners' perceptions of online elements in a beginners' language blended course – implications for CALL design

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How to cite:

Pulker, Hélène and Vialleton, Elodie (2015). Learners' perceptions of online elements in a beginners' language blended course – implications for CALL design. In: Critical CALL – Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy, Research-publishing.net, pp. 475–479.

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.14705/rpnet.2015.000378>

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Learners' perceptions of online elements in a beginners' language blended course – implications for CALL design

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EUROCALL, Padova, 26 – 29 August 2015

Overview

- Introduction
- Blended learning for adult education
- Aims of study
- Methodology
- Findings and discussion
- Some final thoughts
- Questions

Context

- A scholarship project on student retention
- A longitudinal study:
 - 2012/13: learning analytics
 - 2013/14: interviews
 - 2014/15: in-depth analysis of end-of-course student survey
- Some continuing students, majority is new
- Module only or as part of a degree
- Blended course within a context of **distance** learning for **adult** education

Distance learners

- A very diverse student body with varied cultural, social and educational backgrounds
- Majority working full-time or part-time or in career break/change
- Different goals, aspirations and motivations for studies – they exercise some autonomy within the course
- 66% female and 34% male
- Medium age is over 45

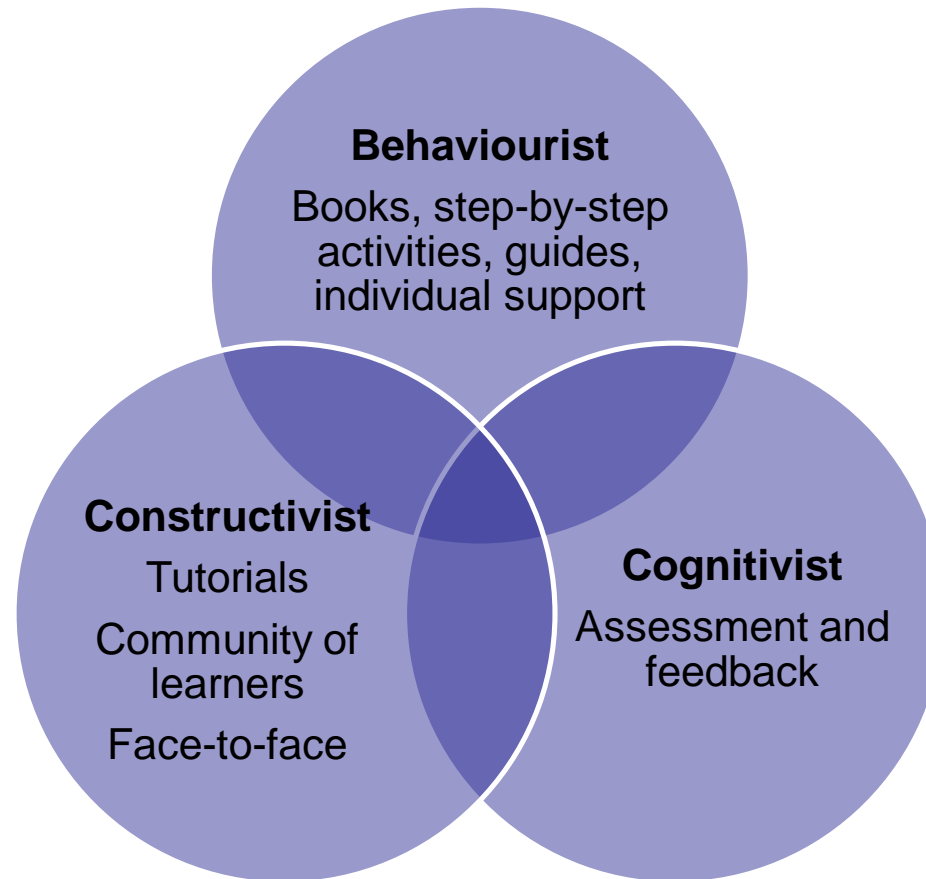
(Coleman and Furnborough, 2010)

Adult learners

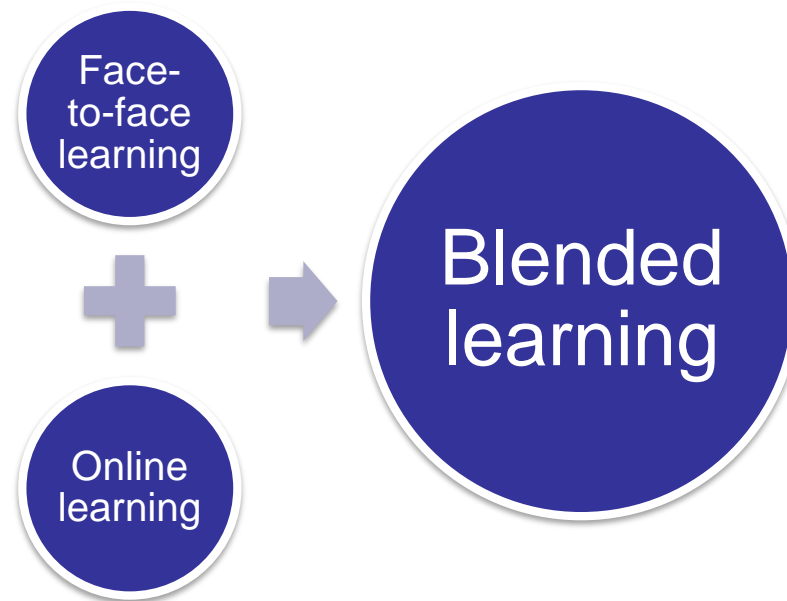
Knowles' (1990) six assumptions about adult learning:

- The need to know
- Learner's experience
- Learners capacity for self-direction
- Readiness to learn determined by life circumstances
- Orientation to learning favours problem solving
- Motivation affected by personal factors

Distance learning theories



Blended learning



The MIT model



(schedule) synchronous \longleftrightarrow asynchronous

(participation) individual \longleftrightarrow community

(technology) off-line \longleftrightarrow online

(guidance) instructor-led \longleftrightarrow self-paced

The Agilant Learning Model: Five Ingredients for the blend

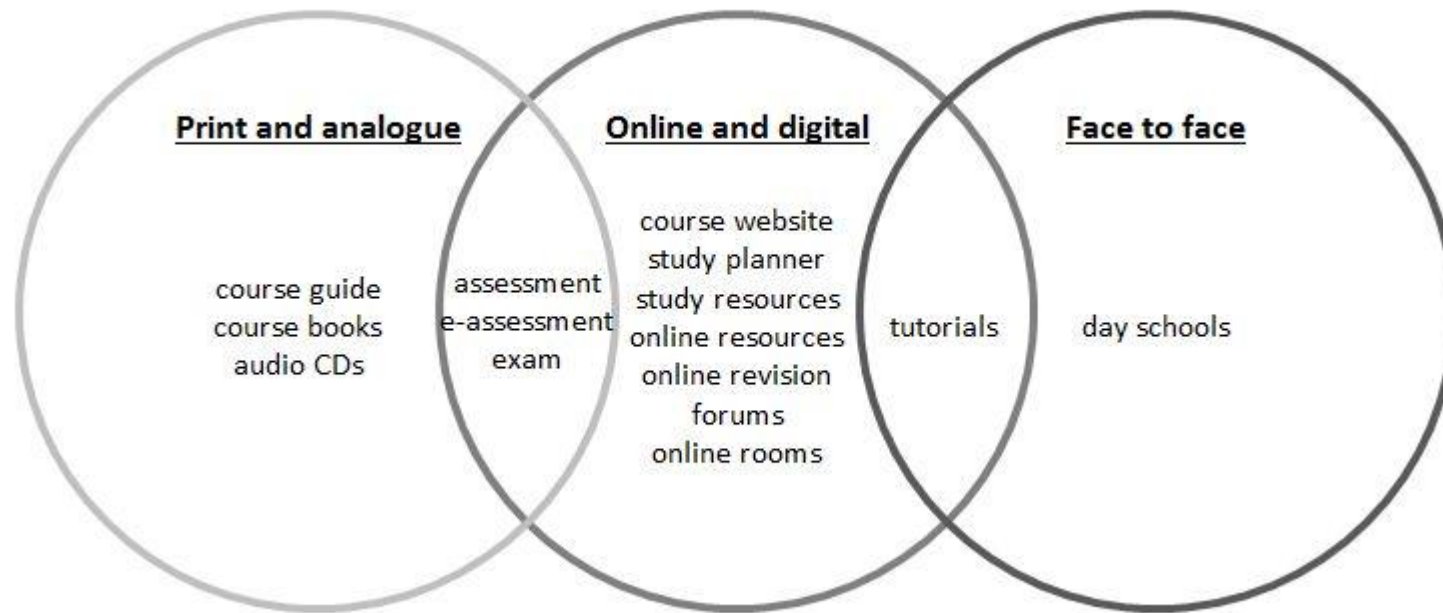


Why blended learning?



http://www.pinstopin.com/blended-learning/cHJvYWxwaGEqY29tfHVwbG9hZHN8cGljc3xibGVuZGVkLWxiYXJuaW5nX0VOKmpwZw_cHJvYWxwaGEqY29tfGVufGFjYWRIbXI8dHJhaW5pbmctY29uY2VwdCpodG1s/

Our blended model



Aim of study

- To examine the new students' perceptions of the online elements of the blend
- To identify possible problematic areas in the blend

Collection of data

- 110 students did not submit the second assignment
- 27 were new and registered on a qualification
- 132 students did not submit the third assignment
- 51 were new and registered on a qualification
- Four students interviewed

Method and data analysis

- One hour telephone interviews
- Researcher from the Institute of Technology department
- Two to three months after submission date
- Recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Four 'at risk' participants: three new students, one continuing, three registered on a degree and one on module-only
- Thematic analysis and coding system underpinned by the Agilant Learning model of blended learning

Findings (1)

Live events:

- Lack of face-to-face tutorials
- Online webinars cause frustration and anxiety (technology)
- Lack of possibilities to practise (mainly speaking skills)

Self-paced activities:

- False expectations with regard to pace and amount of learning (workload issues)
- A clear preference for structured, linear activities in books and praise for the study planner
- Lack of clarity about purpose of activities, resources and tools
- Complexity of the blended learning model (language practice activities vs interactive Computer Marked Assignments, different formats, forums that are not read, website navigation and jargon!...)

Findings (2)

Collaboration/Support:

- Students not interested in chit-chat with peers
- Unable to find forums at times
- Confusion between different people's remits (tutors, module team, Computer Helpdesk, learner support office)
- Excellent one-to-one support from tutors

Assessment:

- Overall students are satisfied with assessment and feedback
- Lack of clarity regarding iCMAs
- Sometimes unaware of requirements to pass the course

Reference materials:

- A strong preference for print over online materials
- Confusion about materials and resources

Sense of confusion

- *“The main problem for me on L192 is prioritizing. Knowing what materials are essential and what are optional”. (Respondent A)*
- *“No, I haven’t made use of the online skills activities or online pronunciation guide, no I am not too sure I was aware of that, but there you are”. (Respondent B)*
- *“Forums? I haven’t seen anything yet”. (Respondent B)*
- *“Online skills activities? I am not sure about those. Are they on the website? Haven’t come across them”. (Respondent C)*
- *“The only thing I found complicated was accessing. There’s lot of information that you get given at the beginning”. (Respondent D)*

Sense of frustration

- *“F2f is good for networking with peers and for reassurance, but OU live tutorials are frustrating” (Respondent A).*
- *“Online would be beneficial except I can’t stand working online. I hate it” (Respondent B).*
- *“I found the module website difficult” (Respondent B).*
- *“It’s irritating that we have to put the right number of spaces in [...]. Yes, I used the online revision activities, those are the ones that caused me aggravation” (Respondent C).*
- *“I attended a couple of online tutorials. I found them very frustrating” (Respondent C).*
- *“There is so many people on there and a lot of them just post things like: oo how is everyone getting on with their assignments or you know... It’s stuff that I don’t really find interesting. [...] If I wanted to ask something, I am not going to ask the other students, I’d rather just ask the tutor” (Respondent C).*

Sense of frustration

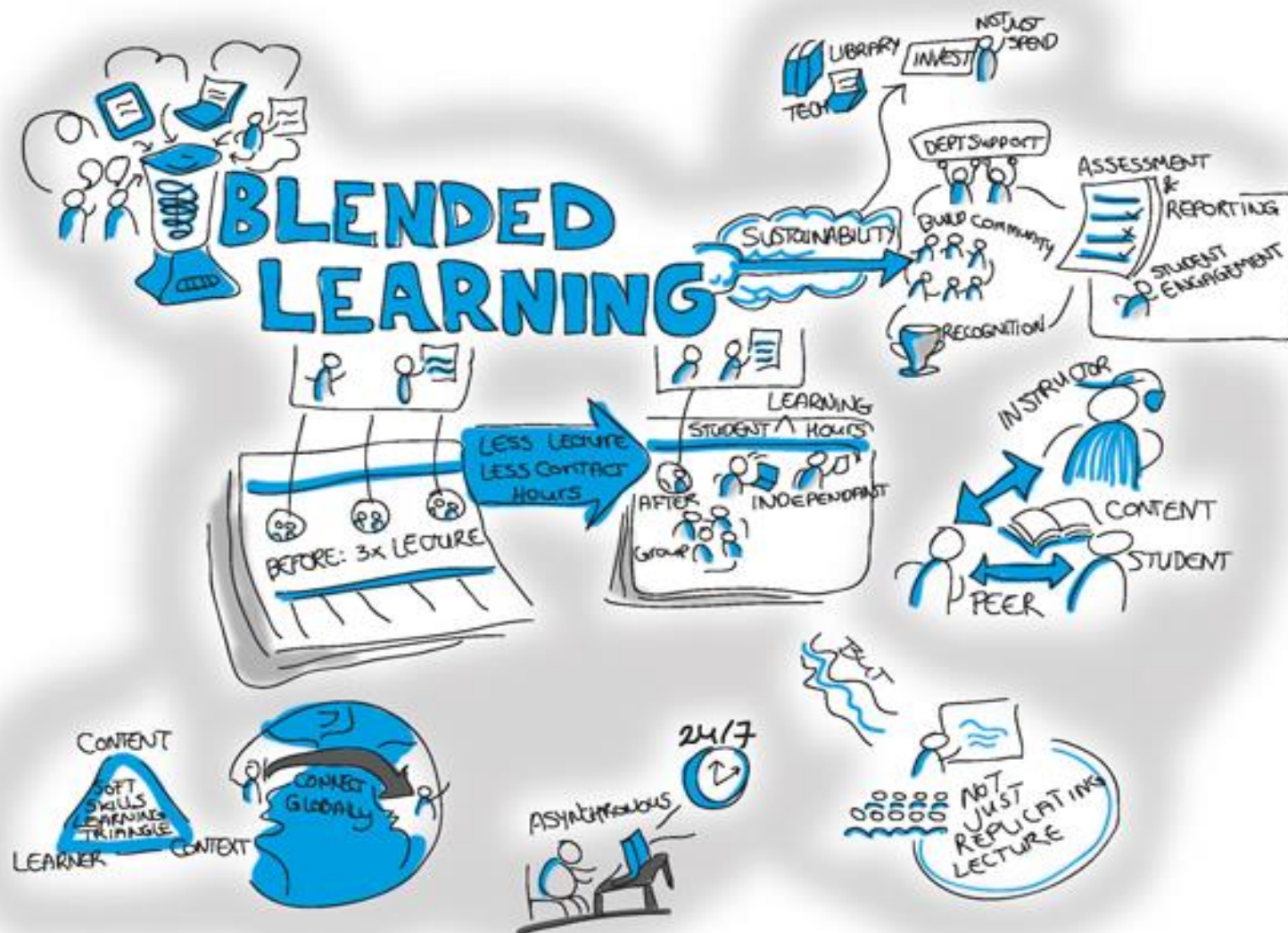
- *“You know, you could post something to say: what did everyone think of this unit. Who cares? I just want to get it, you know, completed, you know, it is what it is. Or some people tried to ask some advice. I think well the tutor, that’s what the tutors are there for” (Respondent D).*

Sense of personal choice

- *“I do use the website – what do I use it for? I like the planner, the study planner, yes, that’s really good. I mean... I don’t use the forum very much but that’s a personal choice and that’s because I don’t get involved in any forum in any context – for people who like that sort of things that is good. Then I use it for submitting my assignments and collecting my results” (Respondent C).*
- *“I think what I’d like to see would be at the end of every unit would be to have a sort of – is to have a sort of summary an exercise – almost like a revision exercise in the book – so a revision exercise” (Respondent C).*
- *“I’ve used the study planner and I’ve used the overview pages to help me identify what key things I need to be able to get my assignments completed” (Respondent D) .*

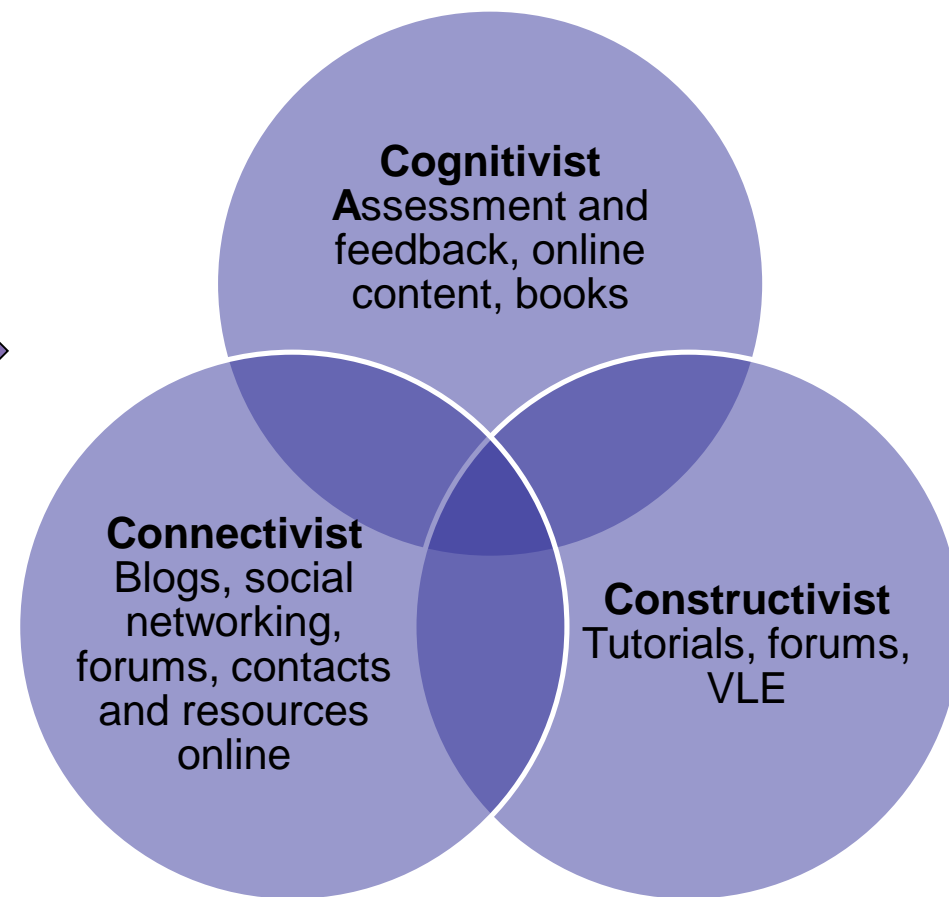
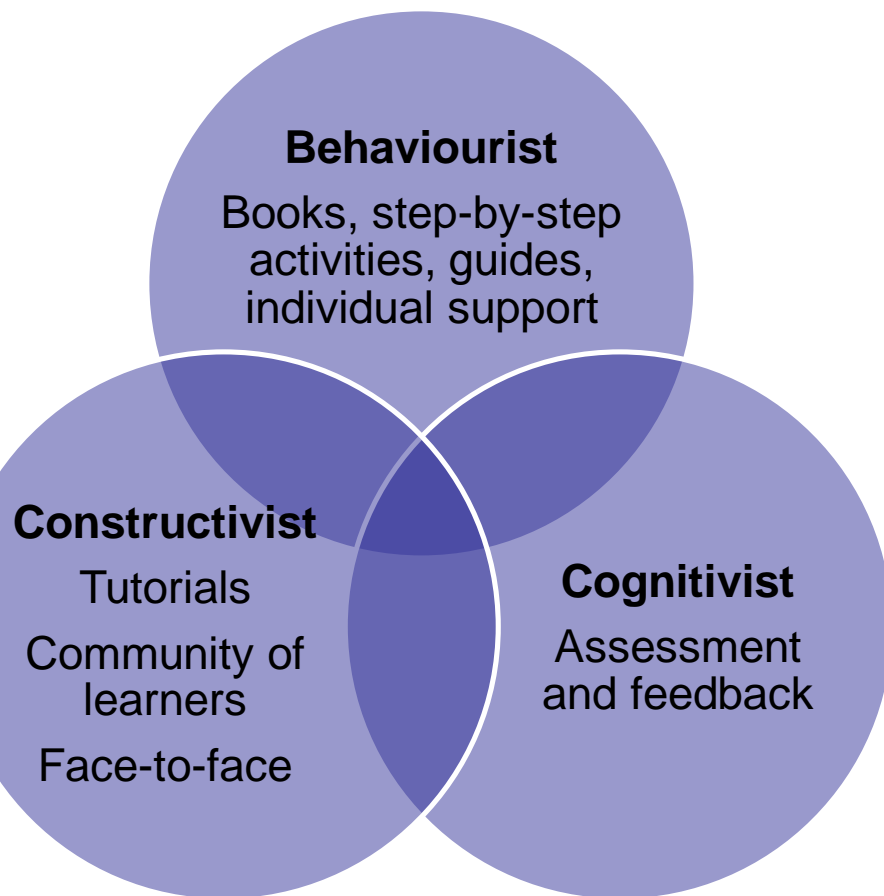
Sense of personal choice

- “I must admit, **face-to-face, for me, is the best**. In the ideal world I would like a lot more face-to-face tutorials. [...] I don’t know if it is possible but I think that face-to-face is very important. [...]. It’s language learning and I think the type of people that want to learn languages will naturally be, well I guess I’m making a wide assumption here, but they will naturally be people that want to learn, like another culture **through meeting people**. [...]. The most enjoyable aspect of the course I must admit I think it might have to be the face-to-face tutorials. [...] I find quite demotivating just sitting on my own studying, a lot of the time. [...] Because, you know, for me, again, you know, I work on computers all day and then I might have finished work at 8 o’clock at night and then there might be a tutorial at that time, which again, it’s online tutorial, here we go again on the computer. Or then I’ve got to listen to my audio resources, again I need to get the computer on. Which, I’m one of these people, **because I work on computers I hate using them at home**. I think the face-to-face is what brings it to life. You know, I go through phases where for two months I think ooh, this is right okay, I need to spend a couple of hours, do this, do that. And then when I go to the face-to-face tutorial I feel wow, this is what I’m doing it for, I really enjoy that and **I really learn a lot**” (Respondent D).



<http://www.vapa.nl/projecten/blended-learning/>

Distance learning theories Online learning theories



Limitation

- Although the sample is very small
 - it is representative of a certain group of language learners
 - findings corroborate previous investigation using learning analytics data
 - some of the issues have been highlighted in the OU Student Retention and Progression 2012/2013 report
 - findings resonate with some other studies of online language learning
- Need further in-depth study of learner's behaviours, actions and choices with regard to the different aspects of the blend and reasons for using some elements over others.

Final thoughts

- Is there a need for more instructions in the (distance) learning materials?
- Should we move to a model of activities ‘à la carte’ or drop-in sessions rather than ‘one-fits-all’ tutorials?
- Does the asynchronous element of blended learning facilitate language learning?
- Should we look at what is informal learning in language acquisition?
- Should we expect learners to work out and agree personal learning plans?

Thank you for your attention!

Any thoughts, comments,
questions?

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